

CLAIMS

1. A method of automatically renting bicycles (1) by means of interactive terminal posts (2) which communicate remotely with at least one rental management server (11),
5 and each of which controls a plurality of locking stations (9) to which the bicycles (1) are locked, said method comprising the following steps:

(a) an initial step consisting in:

• reading a payment card (6);

10 • communicating with an electronic money server (10) for generating a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, this authorization being valid for a limited period;

15 • allocating an authorization identifier to said authorization; and

• storing the authorization identifier in the rental management server (11);

20 (b) at least one subsequent rental step taking place during said limited period and consisting in:

• a user who wishes to rent a bicycle (1) indicating at least one identity code associated with said authorization identifier;

25 • the rental management server (11) being used to verify that the identity code indicated by the user corresponds to said authorization identifier stored in said rental management server; and

• the bicycle rental being authorized or not authorized as a function of said verification; and

30 (c) a debit step consisting in communicating with the electronic money server (10) for debiting said account associated with the payment card for an amount that is a function of the rental operations effected, inclusively from said initial step, said amount being no
35 more than said maximum value.

2. A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the identity code is communicated to a user and, during each subsequent rental step, the identity code is input by said user on an input interface (3).

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3. A method according to claim 1, in which, during the initial step, the identity code is written on an information medium (8), and, during each subsequent rental step, the identity code is read automatically from said information medium (8).

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4. A method according to claim 3, in which, during the initial step, a ticket (8) bearing said identity code and constituting said information medium is issued.

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5. A method according to claim 4, [according to any preceding claim,]in which, during the initial step, the identity code is recorded on a magnetic stripe (8a) carried by said ticket.

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6. A method according to claim 4 or claim 5, in which the code borne by the ticket (8) is written at least in part during the initial step, after the debit authorization.

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7. A method according to claim 6, in which the code written on the ticket (8) includes the authorization identifier generated during the initial step.

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8. A method according to claim 6, in which the code written on the ticket (8) is pre-written at least in part prior to the initial step, and, during said initial step, a correspondence between the code written on the ticket and the identifier determined during the debit authorization is stored in a memory.

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9. A method according to claim 8, in which the code written on the ticket comprises a pre-written portion

written before the initial step and a portion written during said initial step.

10. A method according to any one of claims 4 to 9, in which [according to any preceding claim], during the initial step, a payment card (6) of predetermined format is used, and the ticket (8) presents said predetermined format.

11. A method according to claim 10, in which the payment card (6) presents a magnetic stripe (6a) having a predetermined position, the ticket (8) also presents a magnetic stripe (8a) having the same position, and the identity code is written on the magnetic stripe of said ticket (8).

12. A method according to claim 1, [according to any preceding claim,] in which, during the initial step, a code borne by a mobile phone is recorded as the identity code, and, during each subsequent rental step, the user calls a predetermined number, the calling telephone number is determined, and the authorization identifier corresponding to said identity code is thus determined.

13. A method according to any preceding claim, in which, during each subsequent rental step, when the bicycle (1) is returned to a locking station (9), said bicycle is locked again to said locking station.

14. A method according to any preceding claim, in which the debit step is implemented at a time that is predetermined relative to the initial step.

15. A method according to any preceding claim, in which the debit step is implemented when the cumulative cost of the rental operations that have taken place during said

limited period reaches a certain predetermined amount that is no more than said maximum value.

5 16. A method according to any preceding claim, in which the initial step includes an initial rental step during which, after the debit authorization, at least one bicycle (1) that is locked to a locking station (9) is released, and then, when the bicycle is returned to a locking station, said bicycle is locked to said locking
10 station again.

17. A method according to any preceding claim, in which, each time a rental operation takes place, the value of a sum owed by the user of the payment card is incremented.
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18. A method according to any preceding claim, in which each bicycle is identified at least when it is taken out and when it is returned, and when a bicycle taken out is not identified as a bicycle returned at the end of a
20 certain predetermined time limit, the debit step is preformed immediately, and a deposit is debited from said account.

19. A method according to any preceding claim, in which,
25 during the initial step, a confidential code is determined, and, during each subsequent rental step, the rental is authorized only after verifying that the confidential code is known by the user requesting the rental.

30 20. A method according to any preceding claim, in which provision is made for the confidential code to be chosen by the user during the initial step.

35 21. A method according to any preceding claim, in which, during the debit step, the rental management server (22)

communicates the authorization identifier and the owed sum to the electronic money server (10).

22. A method according to any preceding claim, in which, during the initial step, an address given by the user is stored in a memory, and communication is established with the user via said address if a bicycle taken out using the identity code of said user is not returned within a predetermined time limit.

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23. A system for implementing a method according to any preceding claim, said system comprising:

• interactive terminal posts (2) which communicate remotely with at least one rental management server (11), and each of which controls a plurality of locking stations (9) to which the bicycles (1) are locked;

• means (5) for reading a payment card (6);

• means (2a) for communicating with an electronic money server (10) for obtaining a debit authorization for debiting a certain maximum value from an account associated with the payment card, said authorization being valid for a limited period, and said authorization being identified by an authorization identifier;

• means for storing said authorization identifier in the rental management server (11);

• means for acting by communicating with the rental management server (11) to determine whether an identity code indicated by a user corresponds to said authorization identifier, so as to authorize or not authorize the desired rental of a bicycle as a function of said verification; and

• means (2a) for communicating with the electronic money server (10) for debiting an amount that is a function of the rental operations effected from the account associated with the payment card.